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AN ENQUIRY INTO THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE Poems aſcribed to OSSIAN.

BY

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M.DCC.LXXXI.

THINGS ſingularly novel, or of the moſt remote antiquity, ſeldom fail, in ſome degree, according to their intrinſic merit or collateral circumſtances, of attracting the attention of mankind. Of this obſervation the poems aſcribed to Oſſian is a rare demonſtration. Antiquity being the taſte of the period wherein theſe productions appeared in public, they were everywhere, and by every body, read, and by many with admiration. The fragments the *tranſlator* at firſt ſhewed to the world, raiſed the public expectations, inſomuch that not only his expences were borne in a journey through the Highlands, by the literati in and about Edinburgh, to collect more, but

the book was afterwards taken into every hand.

A variety of reaſons occaſioned with ſome, doubts of the authenticity of the fragments; and many were thorough ſceptics as to the poems of Fingal and Temora. — Hence the controverſy between ſome of the Scotch and Engliſh literati, who affirmed, that they never exiſted in any other form than that in which we have ſeen them.

The ingenious and learned Dr. Johnſon firſt ſtarted objections; and thoſe aroſe from the internal evidence of the poems againſt their authenticity, and other facts, which ſerved to confirm the Doctor in his infidelity.

To the internal evidence much hath been elegantly ſaid by Dr. Blair of Edinburgh; and many ſeeming facts were produced to corroborate the whole. Dr. Johnſon was too ſincere a friend to truth, to accept of an elegant criticiſm by a profeſſor of rhetoric as internal evidence, and letters, and ipſe dixits

from

from the Highlands for a demonſtration of authenticity. He knew the poems were every where read, and that Caledonians, naturally partial to their country and its antiquities, were not "ſturdy enough moraliſts" to di own an honour politically done them by a politically cunning *tranſlator*.

To induce the public to buy his book, it was neceſſary to ſuit their preſent taſte, which was antiquity, and to fix the date of his poem at a remote period: therefore he actually made a journey into the Highlands; and in his Introduction to his Fingal he ſays, that by *paſſing ſix months in the iſlands and weſtern coaſts of Scotland, together with the help of ſome manuſcripts, he has been enabled to give the world theſe poems in their preſent form.* This was all the evidence he had to produce for their authenticity; which was enough, were it true, and had he immediately produced the originals, which any gen-

tleman of letters might expect to ſee, and the public had a right to be put in poſſeſſion of. Theſe, however, although promiſed by the *Editor*, have not yet emerged from Mr. Macpherſon's ſtrong box.

The rapid ſale of the poems naturally enough flattered the editor, and the Scotch nation in general; and the Highlanders, whom they more immediately concerned, were ſingularly elated with this acceſſion of *honour* and ſeeming proof of their antiquity and learning. Whilſt editions were ſelling off, and ſome of the Scotch and Engliſh doubting their authenticity; and the Highlanders and their partizans, from the *love* of their country and their own *honour*, which they imagined concerned, were ſtrenuouſly ſupporting, either with the pen or converſation, in every circle, the genuineneſs of Oſſian; Mr. Macpherſon had time to recollect himſelf, and to chooſe the

part that was moſt agreeable to his opening views and intereſt.

Being certain that the ſucceſs of the book depended on impoſing the authenticity on the public (which, as it afforded ſome entertainment, was not thought very diſhoneſt) he confirmed the blind zeal of his countrymen, whoſe curioſity to inveſtigate never carried them further than converſation, by exhibiting an old Iriſh manuſcript, which neither himſelf nor they could decypher—or, if any wiſhed to hear ſome lines recited, the ſpecimen which he tranſlated from Engliſh into Galic readily ſupplied him. Thus the Scotch, were led to defend his cauſe, and Dr. Blair was impoſed on by others, to publiſh a diſſertation on the ſubject; whilſt Mr. Macpherſon, ready to ſnatch thoſe laurels that might beſt adorn his brow, ſometimes inſinuated he was the author, at other times confirmed his countrymen in what, for the honour of

their nation, they wiſhed to prove true, but were at all times ready to believe.

In the year 1774, Dr. Johnſon publiſhed an account of his journey to the Highlands and Iſlands, in which he gives the public his opinion of the genuineneſs of the poems aſcribed to Oſſian, and the conduct of the ſuppoſed tranſlator towards the public.

" I ſuppoſe, ' ſays the Doctor, " my " opinion of the Poems of Oſſian are " already diſcovered. — I believe, they " never exiſted in any other form than " that in which we have ſeen them. " The editor, or author, never could " ſhew the original, nor can it be ſhewn " by any other. To revenge rational " incredulity by refuſing evidence, is a " degree of inſolence with which the " world is not yet acquainted ; and " ſtubborn audacity is the laſt refuge " of guilt. It would be eaſy to ſhew

" it,

" it, if he had it; but whence could it
" be had? It is too long to be remem-
" bered, and the language formerly had
" nothing written. He has, doubtleſs,
" inſerted names that circulated in po-
" pular ſtories, and may have tranſlated
" ſome wandering ballads, if any can
" be found; and the names, and ſome
" of the images, being recollected, make
" an inaccurate auditor imagine, with
" the help of ſome Caledonian bigotry
" that he has formerly heard the whole.

" I aſked a very learned miniſter in
" Sky, who had uſed all arts to make
" me believe the genuineneſs of the
" book, whether at laſt he believed it
" himſelf? but he would not anſwer.
" He wiſhed me to be deceived, for the
" honour of his country; but would
" not directly nor formally deceive me.
" Yet has this man's teſtimony been
" publicly produced, as of one that held
" Fingal to be the work of Oſſian.

" It is ſaid, that ſome men of inte-
" grity have heard parts of it; but they
" all heard them when they were boys;
" and it was never ſaid that any of them
" could recite ſix lines. They remem-
" ber names, and perhaps ſome prover-
" bial ſentiments, and, having no diſ-
" tinct ideas, coin a reſemblance with-
" out an original. The perſuaſion of
" the Scots, however, is far from uni-
" verſal; and in a queſtion ſo capable of
" proof, why ſhould doubt be ſuffered
" to continue? The editor has been
" heard to ſay, that part of the poem
" has been received by him in the
" Saxon character. He has then found,
" by ſome peculiar fortune, an unwrit-
" ten language, written in a character
" which the natives probably never be-
" held.

" I have yet ſuppoſed no impoſture
" but in the publiſher; yet I am far
" from certainty, that ſome tranſlations

" have

" have not been lately made, that may
" now be obtruded as parts of the ori-
" ginal work. Credulity on one part,
" is a ſtrong temptation to deceit on
" the other, eſpecially to deceit of which
" no perſonal injury is the conſequence,
" and which flatters the author with his
" own ingenuity.

" The Scots have ſomething to plead
" for their ſo eaſy reception of an im-
" probable fiction. They are ſeduced
" by their fondneſs for their ſuppoſed
" anceſtors. — A Scotchman muſt be a
" very ſturdy moraliſt, who does not
" love Scotland better than truth: he
" will always love it better than en-
" quiry; and, if falſhood flatters his
" vanity, will not be very diligent to
" detect it. Neither ought the Engliſh
" to be much influenced by Scotch
" authority; for of the paſt and preſent
" ſtate of the whole Earſe nation, the
" Lowlanders are at leaſt as ignorant as
" ourſelves. To be ignorant is painful;

" but

" but it is dangerous to quiet our un-
" eaſineſs by the deluſive opiate of haſty
" perſuaſion.

" But this is the age in which thoſe
" who could not read, have been ſup-
" poſed to write; in which the giants
" of antiquated romance have been ex-
" hibited as realities. If we know lit-
" tle of the ancient Highlanders, let us
" not fill the vacuity with *Oſſian*. If
" we have not ſearched *Magellanic* re-
" gions, let us, however, forbear to
" people them with Patagons."

From this circumſtance, one would readily think that a youthful and ambitious mind would rejoice at ſuch notice taken of him in a publication by the firſt writer of the age, and graſp at an opportunity of deriving conſequence from diſputing with ſo ſuperior an antagoniſt. But, ſtrange to tell! when the public might have looked for a depoſit of the manuſcript, or a publication of the original, according to promiſe, on this

this open and public declaration of a forgery, Mr. Macpherſon's iraſcibility flamed forth, and he only had recourſe to the ſingle argument that always remains for the defence of impoſture, the *argumentum ad hominem*, or *baculinum*. He wrote accordingly a letter, the particulars of which I have not been able to learn; but they were ſuch as extracted from the Doctor the following anſwer:

" Mr. James Macpherſon,

" I received your fooliſh and impu-
" dent letter.—Any violence that ſhall
" be attempted upon me, I will do my
" beſt to repel; and what I cannot do
" for myſelf, the law ſhall do for me:
" for I will not be hindered from ex-
" poſing what I think a cheat, by the
" menaces of a ruffian. What would
" you have me retract? I thought your
" work an impoſture; I think ſo ſtill;
" and for my opinion, I have given

" reaſons

" reaſons which I here dare you to
" refute.—Your abilities, ſince your
" Homer, are not ſo formidable; and
" what I hear of your morality, in-
" clines me to credit rather what you
" ſhall prove, than what you ſhall
" ſay.

" S. JOHNSON."

At this kind of argument, youth might prevail over age; but the original cauſe is generally weakened, if it does not ſhew that no better can be produced, by ſuch an appeal.— For the honour of my country, and for the ſake of a language on which I have beſtowed ſo much pains, I am ſorry the editor of Oſſian has had no better method of defence. Had the heroes, however, met, it is likely poſterity, with greater certainty, might look for and examine at home the fields where Fingal and Swaran, Robin Hood and Little John, fought their ſingle combat, without giving the

curious

curious the trouble of exploring the Ultonian Plains or Mariſchal Wood. For bulk and ſtature, I would think it would be no bad repreſentation of thoſe ancient heroes; and in this I am ſure they would excel them, as far as real heroes do thoſe of the imagination.

When the ebullitions of iraſcibility had ſubſided, reaſon had reaſſumed her ſeat, and the incompetency of the *argumentum baculinum* to prove a literary truth was manifeſt, the next reſource was to cauſe Mr. Becket ſubſcribe an advertiſement in a public news-paper, to this purpoſe:

"That, during ſix weeks after the "firſt publication of the Poems, the "original manuſcript lay at his ſhop, "for the inſpection of the curious.

(Signed) "T. BECKET."

This MS. was never ſeen by any perſon. Why was it not left there at the time the advertiſement was publiſhed?

The

The reaſon is plain—as he had no MS. of the poems, he was afraid that ſome Iriſh gentleman might inſpect it, and find, in place of Oſſian's poetry, the genealogy of his own family, and his relation with ſome one of the monarchs of Ireland. For it is very well known, that the Earſe dialect of the Galic was never written nor printed, until Mr. Macfarlane, late miniſter of Killinvir, Argyleſhire, publiſhed, in 1754, a tranſlation of *Baxter's Call to the unconverted.* Since his time there have been ſome ſongs and books of piety printed. This I can eaſily prove, becauſe no Earſe MS. ever was or can be produced: and although the Pſalms of David, and Confeſſion of Faith, have been tranſlated into Galic, it is well known that it is neither the Earſe ſpelling nor dialect, but written in the Iriſh Galic; and therefore not every where in the Highlands well enough underſtood, although ſung in churches. It was firſt publiſhed

in

in 1694, and was verſified by the ſynod of Argyle: but the beſt-executed pſalms are allowed to be done by the Romiſh clergy of the north of Ireland. Indeed I am apt to think the whole have; for the monkiſh clergy of Ireland had a variety of verſions compoſed very early; beſides, the Preſbyterian clergy, in theſe early periods of the Reformation, were far from being learned; for, on account of the troubles of the times, the unſettled ſtate of the church, and parting with all eccleſiaſtical revenues, and from the ſcarcity of paſtors, hands were ſuddenly laid on thoſe who could aſſume an aſperity of manners, or pretend to ſpiritual influences.

Lieut. Col Vallancey, in his Grammar of the Iriſh, ſays, " Mr. Macpherſon, in his poem of Temora, p. 184, has given us a few lines of the original in Earſe; *the words, he tells* us, *are not, after the Iriſh manner, briſtled over with unneceſſary quieſcent conſonants, ſo diſagreeable*

diſagreeable to the eye, and which rather embarraſs than aſſiſt the reader. It is difficult to underſtand Mr. Macpherſon's meaning in this paſſage, unleſs he intends it as an apology for the omiſſion of ſome radical Celtic conſonants, which have ever been a ſtumbling-block to the modern Scots. However, in contradiction to this flouriſh, Mr. Macpherſon has introduced no leſs than twenty aſpirated conſonants, with the hiatus he annexed to them, in the firſt twelve lines he has favoured us with of the original poem. The reader will judge whether choille *Earſe*, c'oille *Iriſh*, thairis *Earſe*, or t'airis *Iriſh*, iulluir-huil *Earſe*, or fiolair-s'uil *Iriſh*, do moſt embarraſs the Celtic reader; and to all others, it is of no conſequence how theſe words are written. The corruption of the Celtic in this example is worthy of notice, and in my opinion is a ſtrong proof of the novelty of this poem; or, if it be ancient, it is a proof of the unlettered

ignorance

ignorance of the ancient Gallic Scots. In line 4, illuir-huil, i. e. eagle-eyed, ſhould have been ſiolair-s'uil, or, in the Earſe manner, ſhiallair-ſhuil, &c. The word has been corrupted into jolar both in Earſe and Iriſh, but never was written julluir: and Mr. Macpherſon is referred to the tranſlation of the Galic pſalms, by the Synod of Argyle, begun in 1659, and publiſhed at Glaſgow 1765; in pſalm 103, v. 5, he will find this line:

Mar iolar luath nan ſpeur;

which corrects the fault in the 4th line of the poem of Temora.

Mar illuir-ſhuil greine nan ſpeur.

Again, pſalm xi. 4.

Is leir da ſhuilibh, &c.

If we were to criticiſe on every corrupt word in the twelve lines before us, it would require many pages; we ſhall therefore defer that until we are favoured with a ſight of the original."

Theſe obſervations, from a man of ſo much knowledge in Celtic learning as Col. Vallancey poſſeſſeth, is another argument to confirm me in what I always believed, that the ſpecimen given by Mr. Macpherſon is his own tranſlation from the original Engliſh. And I can eaſily prove that theſe lines have never been known to any Highlander in Scotland, before he publiſhed them; but to my certain knowledge, within theſe few years, an illiterate Highland porter, or cady of Edinburgh, has got them by heart, being frequently read to him by a gentleman zealous to ſupport the impoſture. This gentleman is himſelf an *ingenious* tranſlator, of whom I ſhall have occaſion to make mention hereafter. If Mr. Macpherſon ever intends to publiſh a Galic verſion, he would do well to attend to the true orthography of the old Galic, eſpecially if he wiſhes to continue the impoſture. Many of the Scots agree with the Colonel's obſervation. Profeſſor Macleod, of Glaſ-

gow,

gow, in a letter to me, begged "that in my Grammar of that language, I ſhould not throw away the radical conſonants, nor apply the powers of the letters in Engliſh to Galic writing, as Mr. Macpherſon did in the ſpecimens he gave us of Temora."

In this ſituation the matter has been left by the Editor, to be controverted between the Scotch and Engliſh. Unfortunately, however, for the cauſe of the advocates for the authenticity, the moſt ſenſible, diſintereſted, and conſiderable part of the Scotch, have declared their doubts. The ſilence of the tranſlator, if he had any thing to ſay, was abſurd and ungrateful, both to his country and thoſe gentlemen who ſupported and ſuggeſted to him the original plan. Dr. Blair, of all men, has the greateſt reaſon to be diſpleaſed, who has been impoſed on, and led to write in defence of a forgery.

But although the author would produce no ſort of evidence, individuals

made it a national cauſe; and ſeveral books have been publiſhed, to eſtabliſh as genuine, what they themſelves ſecretly diſbelieved, never ſaw, and of which they know nothing, excepting ſome of the names which are current in the fables of the country.

I could wiſh to be able to reduce this little treatiſe to method, and to advert to all the authors who have attempted to ſupport the authenticity ſeverally; but as they uſe the ſame arguments, only differing in degree, theſe I will diſprove in order as they occur.

As Dr. Blair's Diſſertation was the firſt publication on the ſubject, and the only one that has offered facts, I ſhall begin with it. I have nothing to ſay of the merit or demerit of the criticiſm, becauſe that will be the ſame, whether genuine or falſe; but I will briefly advert to whatever he has ſaid, to prove the poems the compoſition of Oſſian.

To prove them by internal evidence, the Doctor ſays, "In their battles, it

"is

" is evident that drums, trumpets, and " bagpipes were not known nor uſed." I believe, as well as the Doctor, that drums are modern, and that bagpipes are not very ancient; and Mr. Macpherſon would take care to introduce none of theſe. But trumpets were both known and uſed; and the author, knowing a trumpet to be the moſt ancient, makes uſe of it, and commonly calls it the War-horn of Fingal. In this particular the Doctor's argument either falls, or militates againſt itſelf.—" Even a mountain, the ſea, or a lake, when Oſſian has occaſion to mention them," ſays the Doctor, " though only in a ſimile, are for the moſt part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the ſtorm of the ſea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego." The author ſurely would not be ſo uncircumſpect as to uſe the name of Parnaſſus, Scylla, and Charybdis, or the reeds of the Red Sea. This is no more than what every poet, and in every

country, has done; and this *internal* evidence proves nothing.

"To ſuppoſe that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been *in a ſtate of groſs ignorance* and barbarity, there ſhould have ariſen in that country a poet of ſuch exquiſite genius, and of ſuch deep knowledge of mankind, and of hiſtory, as to diveſt himſelf of the ideas and manners of his own age, and to give us a juſt and natural picture of a ſtate of ſociety ancienter by a thouſand years; one who could ſupport this counterfeited antiquity through ſuch a large collection of poems, without the leaſt inconſiſtency; and who, poſſeſſed of all this genius and art, had at the ſame time the ſelf-denial of concealing himſelf, and of aſcribing his own works to an antiquated bard, without the impoſture being detected, is a ſuppoſition that tranſcends all bounds of credibility."

In this ſentence I think the Doctor has

juſt

juſt reaſon to apprehend the virulent reſentment of Mr. Macnicol, and his embelliſher, for a compliment more groſs than any that came from Dr. Johnſon. "Highlands well known to have been in a ſtate of groſs ignorance and barbarity!" Mr. Macnicol will not allow that the Highlands was ever in a ſtate either of "ignorance or barbarity;" nor indeed do I ſee any reaſon the Doctor has favoured us with, why we ſhould conclude the Highlands was in greater barbarity in the 15th than in the 2d century, or why there ſhould not be as good an Offian in one age as in another. As for the ſelf-denial of the author, it was only for a year or two, in order to ſell as many editions as poſſible; for he well knew that they would loſe a great part of their merit, ſo ſoon as it was known they were modern.—But now that the palate of the public is ſated, that he has got the copy ſold, and the money in his pocket, he allows the zeal of his country to at-

tempt eſtabliſhing what he neither wiſhes, nor can himſelf prove.

" Another circumſtance," ſays the Doctor, " is the abſence of religious ideas"—Oſſian *has* a mythology. The author knew that was neceſſary to conſtitute an epic poem; and genuine hiſtory inſtructing him when the Chriſtian religion was introduced into Ireland and Scotland, it was natural to ſuppoſe he would, as much as poſſible, avoid any alluſions to it. In this, however, he has oftener than once failed; for in Temora we find the Chriſtian expreſſions, " peace to thy ſoul," " bleſt be " thy ſoul." But the religion of that æra was not what Mr. Macpherſon tells us.—His mythology he has raiſed entirely on the ſuperſtition of the ſecond ſight, heightened by poetry, and the ſtories of ghoſts, apparitions, &c. ſo common in the fifteenth century, which he affects ſo much to deſpiſe; but to which, however, he is indebted for all the materials he has had.

The

The other great ſpirits to which alluſions ſometimes are made, is nothing leſs nor more than the common Highland idea of the Devil, who is believed to raiſe every ſtorm, and go abroad with it. All theſe notions are ſtill prevalent in the mountains, and a proper part of a mythology. In ſhort, the whole machinery is nothing but the ſuperſtition of the Highlands, poetically embelliſhed.

The ſpirit of Loda is ingeniouſly tranſlated from Ireland into a Scandinavian god, taken from a tale called *Muirarlach mor o Laidhan*. Mr. Macpherſon, not perhaps knowing that *Laidhan* was the Iriſh name of Leinſter, turns it to Loda, and calls it a part of Scandinavia. The tale makes Muirarlach a ſort of monſter, and ſometimes a knight-errant engaging a windmill, and then a giant, ſtriding from hill to hill acroſs Erin. It afforded, however, to an author, a good hint; and Mr. Macpherſon accordingly conjured it to the

ſpirit

ſpirit of Loda. This tale is common in the Highlands to this day.—Alluſions to clans, for the ſame reaſons, common underſtanding would teach to avoid.

An objection, which has been ſtarted by Dr. Percy, Dean of Carliſle, is, "that although the *wolf* and the *bear* were natives of this iſland, in thoſe early days, yet neither is ever mentioned by this fictitious Oſſian. The moſt modern epic ſongs, and thoſe *Iriſh Oſſians* of the 15th century, as the *modern Oſſian* calls them, abound with ſimiles of this ſort: and a hero is frequently compared to a wolf or bear." This is a reaſonable and juſt objection, of which the author was not aware.—We can ſuppoſe no period of ſociety, when cows, ſheep, and goats were not known; for by all travellers, and from every hiſtory, it appears that brutes did propagate much faſter than mankind; and wherever the human ſpecies have been found, there alſo quadrupeds exiſted. Yet Mr. Macpherſon, in order to ſupport the great

antiquity

antiquity of his poems, in a note, p. 350, vol. i. introduces a ſhort poem, with *modern* and *unpoetical* alluſions to *goats* and *herds*, *cows ſeeking ſhelter*, and *ſhepherds wandering* after their flocks.

Dr. Blair very ingeniouſly takes advantage of this circumſtance, in his Diſſertation, p. 31; and, contrary to other criticks, thinks it very *unpoetical* to introduce ſheep, cows, and goats, whilſt he delights in the deſcription of Cuchullin's chariot, "the children of the Rein!" Why might not cows, goats, and ſheep live on the mountains of Scotland, and the plains of Erin, as well as the "children of the Rein," or the deer? Was there any thing in the ſoil or climate to refuſe ſuſtenance to thoſe animals, any more than to horſes? Do not all theſe live together at this day? The biſon, a ſpecies of wild cow, the peculiar native of the foreſts and mountains of Scotland, although now extinct, was certainly common in thoſe days; yet no mention is made of it.

Hunting

Hunting the wild boar is often mentioned in the few ſcraps of ancient poetry that ſtill remain; which Mr. Macpherſon makes little of, becauſe, according to his account, they "want "age," being the compoſition of the 15th century; although the genuine Oſſian knew nothing of it: unleſs indeed we ſuppoſe that brutes did not multiply ſo faſt in the firſt ages as man. The contrary is true. — It were too much to ſuppoſe that the author could be ſo happy as to ſucceed in every thing, and make the deception compleat. In an impoſture, a man cannot ſhut every avenue to detection. However, it has ſucceeded far enough; a variety of editions have been ſold; and the author has acquired credit by his ingenuity.— That was the great deſideratum. I, however, envy it not.

O! grant me honeſt fame, or grant me none.

By many it hath been ſaid, that the ſimiles

ſimiles of Oſſian are taken from ſo remote a period of ſociety, as to be a ſtrong proof of the antiquity of the poem. I grant the ſimiles in general are from nature. And why? Becauſe the country deſcribed as the ſcene of action at this day, and its inhabitants, are in ſome degree but emerging from a ſtate of nature. Thither the author went to ſee the face of the country, and the appearances of nature; beſides that he was born and lived long in the mountains and vallies. Hence that ſerioufneſs which pervades the whole, and which is familiar to every Highlander; and is one great reaſon why every one of them is ſo ready to believe the poems authentic. Any Engliſhman may go down, and ſee theſe phænomena in the elements and face of the country; of which he may lay up a number, and write, when he comes home, poetry of the ſame nature. This indeed has already been done at home, without the trouble of travelling.

 I remember,

I remember, when I travelled that country three years ago, to have ſat down on a hill; and, the ſcene being favourable, in a poetic mood, I jingled together upon paper, with ſuitable invented Galic names, the epithets of blue-eyed, meek-eyed, mildly-looking, white-boſomed, dark-brown locks, noble, generous, valiant, tears, ſpears, darts, hearts, harts, quivers, bows, arrows, helmets, ſteel, ſtreams, torrents, noble deeds, other times, bards, chiefs, ſtorms, ſongs, &c. and produced a little poem, which reads pretty ſmoothly; and, if I had a mind to publiſh it, it would be no difficult matter to perſuade ſome people I had tranſlated it from the Galic: for I might tranſlate a ſtanza of it into Earſe, ſhew it to the inquiſitive, and ſay I had the reſt by me; after which they would never enquire.

In this manner a collection hath been made up and publiſhed at Edinburgh, three years ago, by an ingenious *tranſ-*

lator,

lator, Mr. Clarke, entitled *The Caledonian Bards*. It has been reviewed at London, and adduced as an argument for the genuineneſs of Fingal. Mr. Clarke, when I charged him with it, confeſſed that it was entirely made up. — One of the poems of that collection is happily ſet off with the title of *The Words of Woe*. The author told me, all he had for the ground-work of it was, a ſong called *Furram na truaidhe*, compoſed on a late emigration of the Highlanders to America. In the ſame manner the reſt of the collection was made up. It, however, does Mr. Clarke's ingenuity credit; although, in general, for the honour of his country, he alſo wiſhes to carry on the fraud of Oſſian. If the public would continue to purchaſe liberally, there is no knowing what number of poems we might be favoured with from the Earſe! But, unfortunately, the public taſte in this way ſeems now to be fated.

"The time of my departure is nigh,"

is

is a ſentence of Oſſian. — Did not the author of it read the Scriptures? And it is well known the Bible has not been ſo long as two centuries tranſlated into Iriſh; for in Earſe, it has not yet appeared: and the *genuine* Oſſian, Mr. Macpherſon himſelf acknowledgeth to have been totally ignorant of *Roman* and *Greek learning*.

Another powerful objection to the genuineneſs of Oſſian is, that, excepting a few names, all the characters in that poem are the creation of the tranſlator, and are not at all known in the popular tales of the Highlands. Swaran is never once mentioned; but Magnus, a more modern name, is repreſented as engaging Fingal, who is a real but antient captain. — No ſuch kingdom as Morven was ever known in the weſt of Scotland. The name Morven, although at home it is called *Morairna*, ſounds well, and, for no other reaſon, ſuited the author's plan, though it is never once mentioned in any of their

their tales or ſongs. The diſtrict known at this day by that name, is only a part of the pariſh of that name. — Selma is not at all known in Scotland. When I aſked, and particularly thoſe who were poſſeſſed of any poetry, ſongs, or tales, who Fionn was?—for he is not known by the name of Fingal by any—I was anſwered, that he was an Iriſhman, if a man; for they ſometimes thought him a giant, and that he lived in Ireland, and ſometimes came over to hunt in the Highlands. This is the univerſal voice of all the Highlanders, excepting thoſe who are poſſeſſed of abilities and knowledge to peruſe the work of Mr. Macpherſon, and are taught by nationality to ſupport an idle controverſy.

The truth is, this Fingal is no more than, as hath often already been obſerved, an Iriſh chief of the third century, who ſignalized himſelf againſt the northern invaders of thoſe days, and, being made captain, or chief commander, of an army or militia, neceſſary to

be kept under arms for ſome years; and the Iriſh and Scotch Celts being one and the ſame people; had occaſion, at different times, to paſs over to Scotland, where he was joined by the natives, for the mutual defence of both countries. Like a true Scotchman, in order to make his compoſition more acceptable to his countrymen, Mr. Macpherſon changes the name of Fionn Mac Cumhal, the Iriſhman, into Fingal; which indeed ſounds much better, and ſets him up a Scotch king over the ideal kingdom of Morven, in the weſt of Scotland.—It had been a better argument for the authenticity, if he had allowed him to be an Iriſhman, and made Morven an Iriſh kingdom, as well as make Ireland the ſcene of his battles: but, as he muſt need make the hero of an epic poem a great character, it was too great honour for any other country but Scotland to have given birth to ſo conſiderable a perſonage.—All the authentic hiſtories of Ire-

land give a full account of Fingal, or Fionn Mac Cumhal's actions; and any one who will take the trouble to look at Dr. Keating, or any other hiſtory of that country, will find the matter related as above: whereas in the *Chronicon Scotorum*, from which the liſt of the Scotch kings is taken, and the pretended manuſcripts they ſo much boaſt of to be ſeen in the Hebrides, there is not one ſyllable ſaid of ſuch a name as Fingal. A man ſo thirſty after fame, would ſurely court an opportunity of meeting the cotemporary Romans, who certainly would not fail to make mention of ſo great a hero. We will readily grant, that part of the conteſts in Ireland, and the war with Lochlin, is founded in hiſtory, becauſe all the annals of Ireland have handed it down to us; but the author, in order to ſerve his purpoſe, wreſts facts as they may beſt ſerve his end, and, apprehenſive of a future detection, labours with great zeal to deſtroy the credit of all Iriſh

hiſtory, and, with a few bold ſtrokes of his pen, obliterate all the Celtic learning ever known any where, in order to make way for a new ſyſtem of Celtic emigration and Hebridian and Fingalian hiſtory, in the Introduction to the Hiſtory of Great Britain and Ireland, of which nothing was ever heard before. This book was publiſhed on purpoſe to ſupport the impoſture of Fingal.

Whilſt I thus freely ſpeak my ſentiments (for I have had acceſs to know and underſtand the language as well as any man living; having beſtowed more labour and expence upon it than all that went before me) I am not ignorant of doing what may, though innocently, incur not only the diſpleaſure, but the reſentment, of ſome of my compatriots, as derogating much from their ſuppoſed national honour. I profeſs myſelf to be an enquirer after truth; and, as the ſubject in hand is a literary topic, in itſelf of little importance, it

may be diſcuſſed without giving reaſonable offence to the ſenſible, liberal, and diſcerning part of my countrymen; and, if I have their approbation, I ſhall feel little anxiety from the apprehenſion of the malignant virulence and perſonalities that may iſſue from the illiberal few. I never yet could diſſemble, nor perſonate a hypocrite; *truth* has always been *dearer* to *me* than my country; nor ſhall I ever ſupport an ideal national honour founded on an impoſture, though it were to my hindrance. — I can ſhew Dr. Johnſon that there is *one* Scotchman who loves *truth* better than his country, and that I am a *ſturdy* enough *moraliſt* to declare it, though it ſhould mortify my Caledonian vanity. I would therefore wiſh to be conſidered as a perſon who, though I have as much of the *amor patriæ* as I think is a virtue, and though I have the honour to mention the immortal name of Doctor Johnſon amongſt my friends, and have no quarrel with Mr. Macpherſon, unbiaſſed

biaſſed and uninfluenced. Beſides, I am ſure Mr. Macpherſon no longer wiſhes the world ſhould think the poems any thing but his own manufacture; for to me he has oftener than once obſerved, "it was more creditable "to be an author than a tranſlator."—I would deſpiſe myſelf, were I capable of ſupporting an untruth for the friendſhip of any man, or of overturning it, were it in my power, if I had a grudge againſt another. But, as this is not the caſe, the public may look upon me as under no bias whatſoever, influenced by no partiality, nor afraid to tell the truth. I think proper to ſpeak in this clear and open manner, and prefix my name, becauſe I know that ſome men imagine there is no moral turpitude in anonymouſly publiſhing one thing in a pamphlet, whilſt they think and believe the contrary. — But to reſume my ſubject: — The author of the Diſſertation, after ſome elegant criticiſm on the poem, concludes with obſerving,

"that

" that although he underſtands not the " original, yet the *tranſlator* ſeems to " have been animated with no ſmall " portion of Oſſian's ſpirit."—I believe the whole of Oſſian's ſpirit; for no tranſlation was ever well done, at leaſt equal to the original. This is ſaid by Mr. Macpherſon himſelf to be literal; and Dr. Blair ſays, it is animated with a great portion of Oſſian's ſpirit. Is not this a ſtrong argument it is no tranſlation? and the Doctor, how ſtrenuouſly ſoever he has endeavoured to make them appear authentic, muſt have known better; for ſome ſay it is the promiſcuous production of the Doctor and Mr. Macpherſon. (Vide Diſſ. of Dr. Blair, p. 218.)

Before I have done with internal evidence, I muſt take notice of what has been ſaid by Mr. Smith, in a late diſſertation on the genuineneſs of Oſſian's poems. This gentleman, although a man of great modeſty and worth, yet, warmed by national zeal to ſecure the

honour of an ancient Oſſian to the Highlands, and ſtrip the brow of the modern one of thoſe laurels he will one day, in ſpite of all their efforts, claim as his own, avails himſelf of the ignorance of the world concerning the hiſtory of the Highlands in remote ages, and would have us receive conjectures for facts; well knowing, that as we are more ignorant of theſe times, there is greater latitude for conjecture. Concluſions, however, drawn from conjecture, are vague, and will be received as truths only by thoſe who wiſh them true. He, in his Diſſertation, puts us off with giving us a pretty account of the effects of muſic on the human mind in former times; as if there was no ſuch thing in our own days as ſeeing any emotions produced by it. I can tell Mr. Smith, that I have often ſeen many weep to muſic, and forgot I did ſo myſelf, until I diſcovered it by the number of my tears. The tears of joy and ſorrow are equally at the command of muſic.

muſic. Human nature, by improvement, may be ſomewhat varied, but will, in general, continue always the ſame. Mr. Smith has thrown no new light on this controverſy; but only weakened it, by idly adding to the number of diſſertations that avail nothing. I wiſh he had taken up a ſubject more worthy his labour.

At one time he talks of the age of Fingal as an age of hunting, as beſt ſuits his purpoſe; at another, makes mention of it as an age of arts, civilization, and commerce. "The only "buſineſs of men was hunting; the "women wove the robe for their love." People will do and ſay much, and often more than is true, to enforce the belief of what they themſelves wiſh to be true, but are not able to eſtabliſh. All men, however, are not alike credulous. An enquirer after truth, always expects evidence before he gives his aſſent to a propoſition; and, in order to be able himſelf to give an account of the

the faith that is in him, will never believe as true, upon conjectural and probable evidence, that which facts alone muſt prove. That the queſtion in hand is of that nature, is evident:—yet it is very different with the friends of Oſſian: they wiſh the world to believe, for the honour of their country, becauſe Mr. Macpherſon made Fingal a Scotch, and not an Iriſh man.

Mr. Smith then tells the names and reſidence of men in his neighbourhood, "whom he has heard, for weeks to-"gether, repeat ancient poems, many "of them Oſſian's;" but has not given us one line of them as a fact in his Diſſertation; nor, were I to call on him to produce the Galic of any forty lines, in either Fingal or Temora, he could not produce them. Then an ingenious apology would have been contrived:—the man had *died of a fever*, or had emigrated to America. Some ſuch miſchance, notwithſtanding all their diſſertations and noiſe, has befallen the whole

of

of them; for all the Highlands has not yet been able to ſhew three lines, excepting thoſe Mr. Macpherſon publiſhed as a ſpecimen, and which, in reality, is his own tranſlation. If they believe themſelves, let them enjoy it, and not attempt to bully the world into a belief of that for which no ſort of evidence has yet been produced.

He tells us, "Mr. Macpherſon has "always been readieſt to ſhew his ori-"ginals to the beſt judges." I deny it. Mr. Macpherſon often promiſed me a ſight of them. — I believe, without vanity, I may ſay I underſtand the Galic as well as any man living; for I wrote a Grammar and Dictionary of it; and yet, although he appointed, at leaſt at ſix different times, a day for ſhewing them to me, and I as often waited upon him, there was always ſome apology made: — the manuſcripts were at his houſe in the country; or miſlaid; or the key loſt; or I ſhould ſee them ſome other time. Why did he promiſe to

ſhew

ſhew them? And, ſince he promiſed, why not ſhew ſome? Let the public draw inferences. This is true; let Mr. Macpherſon contradict it, if he can. Mr. Smith talks alſo of MSS. that contain theſe poems—Why apply ſo earneſtly to the author for an edition, if they have them in theſe MSS. of their own? For a committee of the Highland Society has waited on Mr. Macpherſon, to requeſt the original ſhould be printed.—But alas! not one line has yet been ſeen, excepting what the tranſlator has made.

Profeſſor Macleod, of Glaſgow, is mentioned as a perſon who was allowed to compare ſome books of the original with the tranſlation; and yet, in a converſation with me at London, who promiſed to purchaſe any number of lines, not under ſix, at the rate of 2*s.* 6*d.* each word, he could neither repeat a ſyllable, nor undertake to procure from Mr. Macpherſon, although then in town, a ſingle line. Thus fruitleſs hitherto

hitherto has been every attempt to diſcover a ſtanza of an original, excepting what has been tranſlated from the Engliſh, to impoſe it as a ſpecimen of an original.—Why not publiſh large extracts from thoſe MSS. of which the authors of diſſertations ſo much boaſt. If they heard formerly, and ſtill (as they aver) know men that repeat them, why not take them down in writing, and publiſh them?—Are they afraid that the Highland public, which is ſo zealous to eſtabliſh the authenticity, will not purchaſe? It cannot be believed.—But the reaſon is, they are not to be found.

Mr. Smith mentions Dr. Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, in which he ſays the Doctor confeſſeth that he himſelf heard pieces of it recited; and, being compared with the *tranſlation*, exactly correſponded.—Dr. Percy does not underſtand a ſyllable of the Earſe, and therefore could be no judge. The truth is, Dr. Blair, and Profeſſor Fergu-

ſon,

guſon, when Dr. Percy was at Edinburgh, took care to introduce a young ſtudent from the Highlands, who repeated ſome verſes, of which Profeſſor Ferguſon ſaid ſuch and ſuch ſentences in Fingal were the *tranſlation*. — Mr. Smith, if he looks into the ſecond and third editions of the *Reliques*, will find the obſervation there no longer; and that Dr. Percy, on reflection, had juſt reaſon to ſuſpect that this young ſtudent had previouſly been taught the part he recited; and the lines might as readily be any common ſong, as the original of Fingal; for they knew it was impoſſible for an Engliſhman to detect it. This author has annexed to his Diſſertations ſome poems, aſcribed to new, and hitherto unknown, poets. He confeſſes they are in ſome degree *altered* from what they were when he received them.—That "he compared different "editions, ſtruck off ſeveral parts that "were manifeſtly ſpurious, and brought "together epiſodes that ſeemed to have

"a relation

" a relation to one another." This is a moſt excellent pretext for giving us a new poem from a few ſtanzas of original: and he takes further care to cover the impoſture, by advancing " that the " current editions are much adulte- " rated." Dargo is the title of one of his poems. There are a very few ſtanzas of poetry in different parts of the Highlands upon this hero Dargo. It is of that ſort which the author of Fingal would call the compoſition of the 15th century.—I have them in my poſſeſſion; and in a ſmall collection of Galic poems, which I have been preparing (for I alſo was about to be a tranſlator!) I have made up a ſort of a poem of ſome length from theſe few ſtanzas, entirely different from Mr. Smith's, only that we both retain the ſame Dargo as our mutual hero. If ſale could be expected for them, I ſhould find it no difficult matter, in my notes, to give ſpecimens of the *original*; and I am ſure I would avoid giving thoſe I received from the people,

people, becauſe they cannot bear a tranſlation. And indeed Mr. Smith gives us not thoſe of the old poet, but thoſe he made from his Engliſh original; the local phraſeology, and the forced ſtrain of which, to any diſcerning reader, point out the impoſition. In ſhort, Mr. Smith's and my little poem both retain the ſame name of Dargo, have received none of the incredible and marvellous feats of the few original lines, and are each of them as different from it, and from one another, as, perhaps, the ſermons would be which he and I might write upon one text. The caſe is the ſame as to the reſt of his collection. The original is promiſed, if ſubſcribers enough appear in ſix months. He has done well to limit the time, in order to have it in his power, at the expiration of ſix months, to refuſe it; by which means he will avoid the labour of tranſlating the whole into Earſe. But I hope thoſe who are ſo anxious to be in poſſeſſion of the

original

original of *Oſſian*, will not neglect to take Mr. Smith at his word. —— If, however, the two copies do not fit each other better than the ſpecimens already ſhewn us, and if the Galic poetry be not better, we ſhall not be at a loſs to judge which is the original; and when it appears, we ſhall not neglect pointing out the vulgariſms and local phraſeology to the few of his countrymen that are judges of the language.

Names are quoted who have given the originals.—Some of thoſe I am acquainted with; and none of them (for nobody could be more diligent and inquiſitive than I have been) could ever produce any thing but a few ſcattered fabulous ſtanzas, ſometimes repreſenting the heroes as men, at other times as giants; ſometimes probable, and often marvellous; none of which can bear a tranſlation. A fertile genius, however, might take up the names as the characters, and write a poem in Engliſh, which a Highlander, *who loved his coun-*

try better than truth, might make himſelf eaſily believe he had frequently heard before. In this manner hath been manufactured every tranſlation, whether Mr. Clarke's, Mr. Macpherſon's, or Mr. Smith's, that have hitherto appeared.

Mr. Macphail of Lorne, Mr. Macalaſter of Tarbert, repeat ſome of the above fables, which may ſerve for a text for a man that can write in Engliſh. Theſe men I have ſeen and converſed with; and although I liſtened a long time to their recitation of fables, &c. I found nothing worthy of a tranſlation, without ſuch extenſive amendments and embelliſhments, as to make it entirely a new work. The Reverend Mr. Mac Dermid, of Glaſgow, is mentioned as well acquainted with the original of Fingal, although he is not poſſeſſed of a ſingle line of Oſſian; and I believe he would purchaſe a few at the price I offered Profeſſor Macleod.

To expect belief from the world, where

where there is no evidence for the truth of a propoſition, is ſuppoſing it credulous indeed; is a diſreſpect, if not an inſult, to the underſtanding of the public. When the propoſition to be proved is a fact, and not mere ſpeculation, or matter of opinion, facts alone, not internal evidence, which always give latitude to conjecture and uncertainty on both ſides, can be a reaſonable proof; and nothing leſs can procure the aſſent of the diſpaſſionate and unbiaſſed mind. That competent facts, although frequently challenged and called for, have not been hitherto produced by the ſupporters of this queſtion, I can eaſily ſhew. Nor would I ever have taken the trouble to ſay a ſyllable on the ſubject, had the partizans of Mr. Macpherſon allowed the diſpute to die, and let the public entertain their own opinion of the matter. But by falſehoods to force us into a belief, becauſe ſuch and ſuch people wiſh it, although no reaſons are given is arrogance, not to be

overlooked; beſides, this now is the only time to aſcertain the truth, whilſt the *tranſlator* is living, that the *original*, if he has it, may be produced, as the only incontrovertible evidence. It is this has extracted from me theſe obſervations. The more is written to prove the authenticity, the more clearly the impoſture appears; and theſe late *Remarks* and *Diſſertations*, in place of ſupporting, have only ſhewn the abſurdity of attempting to ſupport a propoſition, which, becauſe it might bring ſome ideal credit to their country, firſt proceeded from Mr. Macpherſon's mouth, and which, though the *tranſlator* offers no argument, they wiſh to eſtabliſh. I ſhould have been as happy as any of my countrymen can be, to have it in my power to produce the original, and ſo ſatisfy the world; but as not one line of it has hitherto been ſeen, but what Mr. Macpherſon has favoured us with, impoſed as a ſpecimen, though actually tranſlated from the original Engliſh, I

am

am ſo far a friend to truth, that I cannot permit an impoſition to deſcend to poſterity undetected. Had I been ignorant of the Galic, leſs credit might be expected to my narration of facts; but having written a grammatical Analyſis and a Dictionary of it, it may be readily believed I ſhould rejoice to have it in my power to produce the originals of theſe poems to the public, as the Dictionary and Grammar might, perhaps, be ſought after, to help the curious in forming ſome opinion of the original. Thus it would be my intereſt to ſupport the authenticity, did I think it honeſt. Nor ſhall it appear that I have been indolent, inactive, or uninquiſitive after information.

In ſpring 1778, I ſet out from London, for the Highlands and Hebrides, to collect from ſongs, old ſayings, the voice of the people, and manuſcripts, if there ſhould be any, vocables for the dictionary, which I have ſince publiſhed. I knew well the ſtate of the country.

It was my reſolution, in order to ſatisfy myſelf at leaſt, to leave no ſtone unturned, and be in poſſeſſion of theſe poems, if they exiſted. Not above 17 years had elapſed, ſince Mr. Macpherſon had performed his firſt expedition thither. All the Highlanders who repeated poetry, I believed, had not emigrated, nor died; and we have been told that ſome manuſcripts there were in the poſſeſſion of ſome individuals. I was elevated with anticipated ſucceſs; and it was my intention to have ſuperſeded Mr. Macpherſon, by publiſhing an original, could it be had. I had reſolved, had I met with any convincing evidence, to ſay ſomething on the other ſide, to convert not only Dr. Johnſon, but the public, by taking the affidavits of thoſe who recited the poetry, and thoſe who witneſſed it taken down by me in writing, and to have theſe facts properly vouched by the miniſters of the pariſhes, and neighbouring juſtices, where ſuch tranſactions might happen;

and

and in this manner publiſh them. Nay, the original ſignatures of the miniſters and juſtices I intended to have had recognized at Edinburgh, and certified there by people of conſideration, whoſe vouchers of it could not be doubted at London. And I am confident, notwithſtanding the epithets of "ſtubborn "infidelity," "hatred of the Scotch," "refuſing credit to Highland narra-"tion," ſo commonly beſtowed on him by the illiberal, Dr. Johnſon would believe me, and be converted.

Many mountains I traverſed, many vallies I explored, and into many humble cottages I crept on all four, to interrogate their inhabitants. I wandered from iſland to iſland, wet, fatigued, and uncomfortable. No labour I thought too much, no expence too great, whilſt I flattered myſelf with converting the diſbelieving Doctor Johnſon, recovering ſome of the poetry of Oſſian, and ſtripping Mr. Macpherſon's brow of what I then uſed to call them, "ſtolen bays;" for

I then believed there might be an original, and that he rather wiſhed to appear the *author* than the *tranſlator*. As nature, when ſhe denies one ſenſe or faculty, is commonly bountiful by giving another in uncommon perfection, I particularly enquired for the blind, who are often bleſt with a retentive memory, and frequently find their account in narration. I made many deviations to their obſcure retreats; and was frequently engaged in long diſcourſes with the blind, the lame, and the aged. It was ſoon, however, rumoured that I came from London, was in pay from his Majeſty, and therefore they ſet a high value on what every one had hitherto received for nothing, at leaſt for a ſnuff of tobacco. Tobacco, therefore, and whiſky, were neceſſary to chear the ſpirits, and raiſe their enthuſiaſm for recitation; beſides ſome money for their trouble. When theſe were brought from a diſtance, ſo much muſt be allowed for the perſon that was ſuppoſed to be left at home

to

to work in his ſtead; a certain price for his own recitation, previouſly ſtipulated; tobacco and whiſky, to prepare and excite recitative faculties; ſomething to the perſon that was ſent for him; and, if lame or blind, for thoſe that carried or conducted him. This, when ſearches elſewhere prevented my waiting on him at his abode. Thus I ſpared not labour nor expence to procure knowledge; but found myſelf not a little mortified, when all they could repeat was nothing but a few fabulous and marvellous verſes; or ſtories concerning Fionn Mac Cumhal, alias Fingal, and his Fiona or followers chaſing each other from iſland to iſland, ſtriding from mountain to mountain, or croſſing a frith at a hop, with the help of his ſpear. There was much of inchantments, fairies, goblins, incantation rhimes, and the ſecond ſight. When I heard thoſe of one country, I heard all; for they all repeated in general the ſame ſtories: and when I had the narration of a few, I had every thing.

thing. This, however, did not relax my enquiries. I believed theſe to be the *compoſitions of the 15th century*; and beyond the next mountain, in the next valley, or the neighbouring iſland, ſomething of the *genuine Oſſian*'s poetry might have remained. I therefore traverſed and pervaded the whole for near ſix months, but to no purpoſe, as to Oſſian's poetry; and, like every other perſon who attempts to prove or procure evidence for the genuineneſs of thoſe poems, only diſcovered, that, by a certain "intellec-"tual retrogradation, I knew leſs, the "more I heard of it."

In the mean time I did not forget MSS.—Since I could not find the poems in the mouths of the people, I concluded, if they exiſted at all, that Mr. Macpherſon muſt have found them in MSS.; but as I knew the Earſe was never written, I began to deſpair and to doubt. Some told me ſuch a perſon had a MS. who, upon interrogation, ſent me to another, and he to a third, and

ſo

ſo on in a circle, until at length one told me Mr. Macpherſon had carried them all to London. I ſaw one, however, in the poſſeſſion of Mr. Macintyre of Glenace, Argyleſhire; which is mentioned by Mr. Smith, I think, as containing ſome poems of Oſſian. This is as true as the reſt of the ſtory. The manuſcript is on parchment: I examined it: it contains only ſome Iriſh genealogy. It is written in the Iriſh character, dialect, and contraction. It is intelligible to no Highlander, who has not ſtudied the Iriſh written dialect; nor is there one Scotchman I could ever find out, not excepting Mr. Macpherſon himſelf, that can decypher them; neither could I, till after much ſtudy, and conſultation of a variety of keys to the reading of Iriſh manuſcripts. It contains not a line of Oſſian's poetry; if it does, why did not Mr. Smith tranſcribe it, and give us ſome ſpecimens in his Diſſertation?

Having made this fruitleſs enquiry after

after the *genuine Oſſian*'s poetry, from which I only learned there never had been any, I paſſed over to Ireland, there alſo to purſue Oſſian, and other enquiries. I rummaged, with the conſent of Dr. Leland, Trinity College library — examined manuſcripts — had different perſons, who underſtood the character and language, in pay — converſed with all who might know any thing of the matter—and, after all, could diſcover no ſuch poetry as Mr. Macpherſon's; but that the Iriſh had been more careful than the Highlanders, who committed to writing even thoſe *compoſitions of the fifteenth century*. Thoſe, as Mr. Macpherſon obſerves, are beſt left in the obſcurity of the original. There are, however, conſiderable remains of ancient Iriſh learning in manuſcripts of great antiquity. For a liſt of theſe, I refer the curious to Biſhop Nicholſon's Iriſh Hiſtorical Library.

Since it is very certain that the Iriſh had the uſe of letters at leaſt as early as the

the time of Oſſian, who was a real character, though not the author of Mr. Macpherſon's Poems, Fingal and Temora; and ſince it is clear from authentic hiſtory, and the conſent of all the people of the Highlands, that Fingal and Oſſian were Iriſh; how comes it neither Oſſian himſelf, nor any cotemporary, nor any ſucceeding bard or writer, if they have been orally recited, has collected and committed them to writing? Are the compoſitions of the fifteenth century more worth notice than thoſe of the *genuine Oſſian?* And Mr. Macpherſon declares, they have been found, a few years ago, in the mouths of the people. It is impoſſible, if they ever exiſted, that the bards and others, who could write, within theſe three laſt centuries, ſhould not have collected them. Whatever ſongs and epiſodes Oſſian ſung, did not long ſurvive himſelf; and it was difficult for former bards to anticipate the compoſitions of the age of chivalry, unleſs they

they had as much of the ſecond ſight as of the poetical genius.

I would not wiſh to appear to derogate from the real honour and antiquity of Scotland; that can never be affected by the loſs of theſe poems: but when I am conſcious, that without a knowledge of Iriſh learning, we can know nothing of the Earſe as a tongue, (the Iriſh being the ſtudied language, and the Earſe only a diſtant provincial dialect) I cannot but expreſs my aſtoniſhment at the arrogance of any man, who, to make way for the production of 1762, would deſtroy all the archives which the Iriſh, acknowledged by all the world to have been in the eighth century the moſt learned nation in Europe, have been for ages labouring to produce. When the Highlander knows nothing of Iriſh learning, he knows nothing of himſelf; and when Iriſh hiſtory is loſt, Highland genealogy becomes very vague. The Iriſh had laws, many of which have come down to our

own days, written in the ancient language. Fordun and Buchanan, although ſome centuries back, having no knowledge of their own origin, received the liſt of their ancient kings, as recorded in the *Chron. Scotorum*, and other Iriſh books. The vernacular tongue, unlike to Scotland and England, was the vehicle of their laws, teaching, and pleading. They very early had a regulated church, governed by an hierarchy, before the liturgy of Rome was received, and under their own kings, who always ſpoke the language of the country. When Rome obtained the management of ſpiritual affairs, Greek and Roman learning became more common, but through the medium of the Galic; for, different from England, Scotland, and the other ſtates of Europe, their laws and ſtate-buſineſs were not tranſacted in Latin until the Engliſh, in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the Firſt, eſtabliſhed that practice.

Until the Reformation, they had all ſorts of ſchools and colleges: and it

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was not until Elizabeth ordered Engliſh to be taught in all ſchools, and erected Trinity College at Dublin, that theſe were extinguiſhed. Thither the youth of England, and other countries, went for education; and all the popular ſtories of the Highlands at this day agree, that every chieftain went thither for education and the uſe of arms, from the fourth century until the Reformation. Icolumkill was firſt founded by the munificence of the Iriſh; and all the abbots and monks belonging to it, one abbot only excepted, until its diſſolution, were Iriſh. All the Highland clergy not only ſtudied but received ordination in Ireland. The clergy of the Iſlands eſpecially, and thoſe of the weſtern coaſt, were frequently natives of Ireland. Hence it happens, that all the poetical compoſitions, ſtories, fables, &c. of any antiquity, which are repeated in the Highlands at this day, are confeſſedly in the Iriſh Galic. Whatever bards exiſted in the Highlands, received

received their education at the Iriſh academies; and every ſtanza that is remarkably fine or obſcure, is ſtill called *Galic dhoimhan Eirionnach*, i. e. *deep Iriſh*.

No argument can be adduced in favour of Highland learning, from their ancient laws; for none, according to Mr. Macpherſon himſelf, ever exiſted, except the will of the chieftain, until ſome partial and faint influences of it were felt in the reign of the latter Jameſes. Private property has not been legally aſcertained until very lately; for the extent of a chief's territory depended on the number and valour of his vaſſals and followers. Hence it is, that few chieftains at this day can ſhew charters of any conſiderable date. But I can ſhew, from the language of religion, for although Earſe was never the vehicle of learning, and fierce chieftains would not ſubmit to civil government, yet religion, blended with ſuperſtition, was in ſome degree acknowledged by

them, nay, from even the ſtile of the pulpit at preſent in the Highlands, and the few books of piety they have lately publiſhed, that the Iriſh Galic was the language of law, divinity, and poetry. The common Catechiſm, the Confeſſion of Faith, the verſion of the Pſalms ſung in churches, are written in Iriſh; and the language of the miniſter when he preacheth, and the extemporaneous effuſion of the peaſant's prayer, border upon it. As they received in the Highlands their knowledge of the Chriſtian religion from Icolumkill, and Icolumkill from Ireland, all the terms in divinity are immediately Iriſh, and in the remote parts of the Highlands, at this day, not well underſtood. The Earſe dialect is rather barren of words, having never been cultivated; and the preacher that introduceth any idea beyond the Calviniſtic ſyſtem, is difficultly underſtood.—It will be in vain to reaſon abſtractedly, even on morality; and the audience, not only ſtrangers to the ſentiment,

timent, but even to the expreſſion, cannot always comprehend the ſpeaker.

All the Scotch hiſtorians together, have recorded that Scotland received their firſt kings from Ireland; and Mr. Macpherſon allows Fingal's anceſtors to have been Iriſh. The family of Argyle are ſtill ſtiled *Sliochd Dhiarmid*, i. e. the deſcendants of Dermid, an Iriſh chief; and Mackenzie and Macdonal are univerſally acknowledged, and the Scotch peerage and Herald's Office confirm it to be of Iriſh deſcent. In like manner, all the conſiderable Highland families may be ſhewn to have ſprung from the ſame, at leaſt from a foreign line.

Dr. Blair, after ſaying much from *internal evidence*, to prove the *remote antiquity* of Oſſian's poems, proceeds, in an Appendix to his Diſſertation, to Facts, the only method from which any ſucceſs in eſtabliſhing the authenticity of his favourite poems could be expected. — "I had not," ſays he, "the leaſt "ſuſpicion, when this Diſſertation was

" firſt publiſhed, that there was any oc-
" caſion for ſupporting their authenti-
" city as genuine productions of the
" Highlands of Scotland; as tranſlations
" from the Galic language, not for-
" geries of a ſuppoſed tranſlator. In
" Scotland their authenticity was ne-
" ver called in queſtion. I had myſelf
" particular reaſon to be fully ſatisfied
" concerning it. My knowledge of
" Mr. Macpherſon's perſonal honour
" and integrity, gave me full aſſurance
" of his being incapable of putting
" ſuch a groſs impoſition, firſt upon his
" friends, and then upon the public."
—Whatever the Doctor's knowledge of Mr. Macpherſon's perſonal honour then might be, I think he has had reaſon, by this time, to be of a different opinion; for, to uſe the Doctor's own expreſſion, " Mr. Macpherſon has not
" done what he ought to his friends
" and the public." — He certainly promiſed to publiſh, or depoſit them in a library;

library; neither of which has been, and neither will be done.

The ingenious *tranſlator* got the Doctor fairly engaged in a controverſy, to which his taſte of the belles lettres greatly inclined him, and then left him to battle it as he could.

The Doctor ſays, "If the queſtion "had been concerning manuſcripts "brought from ſome diſtant and un- "known region with which we had no "intercourſe; or concerning tranſla- "tions from an Aſiatic or American "language, which ſcarce any body un- "derſtood, ſuſpicions might naturally "have ariſen, and an author's aſſertion "been anxiouſly and ſcrupulouſly weigh- "ed: but in caſe of a literal tranſlation, "profeſſed to be given of old tradition- "ary poems of our own country; of "poems aſſerted to be known in the "original by many thouſand inhabi- "tants of Great Britain, ſuch extreme "ſcepticiſm is altogether out of place." —In this caſe which the Doctor puts,

as few might underſtand an Aſiatic or American language, it might be a very difficult matter entirely to ſatisfy the doubts of thoſe who thought proper to be infidels; but in the caſe of Oſſian, there are numbers in Scotland and Ireland who underſtand the Galic, and any reaſonable evidence produced, would naturally have its due effect.—Where is the evidence? Is it what it ought to be? Where is the original? — When the controverſy was new, and the poems but juſt publiſhed, one would think the Editor, from views of intereſt, regard to his country and truth, and from reſpect to the public, would ſhew the original; yet none of theſe conſiderations had weight with him. The truth is, he had no original to produce, and it was too great trouble to ſit down to tranſlate ſo much into Galic. But the confidence, notwithſtanding, with which the authenticity is aſſerted, without any evidence, is no great degree of modeſty. "Either the *author* muſt have had the

"influence

" influence to engage as confederates in " the fraud all the natives of the High- " lands and Iſlands, or we ſhould, long " ere this time, have heard their united " voice exclaiming, Theſe are not our " poems, nor what we were accuſtomed " to hear from our bards, or our fa- " thers." The anſwer to this argument is very plain — The Highlanders and Scotch, very partial to their country and antiquities, although the tranſlation might differ from what they might have heard repeated, would not take the trouble to detect it, as even that detection might be underſtood as an argument againſt their genuineneſs. They were glad of this new and unknown honour; and many of the names of the heroes in the poems being familiar to their ears, of which they had often heard mention made in the tales and fables of the Highlands in their youthful years, and, in ſome degree, at this day, could be eaſily led, by a little " *Ca-* " *ledonian* bigotry," not only to believe,

but to vouch for their being a "literal "tranſlation of the poems of Oſſian, "with which they had been familiar in "their infancy." From this complexion and diſpoſition, though I agree with Doctor Johnſon, that they had not a "ſettled purpoſe to deceive," the perſons whom Dr. Blair produceth as vouchers of the truth of Oſſian, have been led to give in their names, not doubting but Mr. Macpherſon would perform his promiſe to the public of printing them, or depoſiting the Galic original in ſome library: but both the Doctor, who has publiſhed the names, and thoſe who permitted him, have been handſomely treated by the *tranſlator*.

"But as reaſoning alone is not apt to "make much impreſſion, where ſuſpi-"cions have been entertained concern-"ing a matter of fact, it was thought "proper to have recourſe to expreſs "teſtimonies."—I am glad the Doctor and I agree with regard to the nature of the evidence that in ſuch a caſe can

be

be indiſputable, which is facts. We differ only in this, that the Doctor gives implicit faith to the teſtimony of gentlemen, in ſome degree concerned, without enquiring into the evidence which they themſelves had for their belief; and that I do not give my aſſent to a propoſition upon the teſtimony of any man, however reſpectable, if a party concerned, unleſs he give reaſonable and convincing evidence of his belief, or produce facts that are indiſputable.—The honour of the Highlands was concerned; therefore evidence more convincing than ſignatures and ipſe dixits ought to be ſhewn; eſpecially when the nature of the caſe admits of it; for the originals are ſaid to be in the *tranſlator*'s poſſeſſion, and a ſight of them may be eaſily procured. The Doctor, however, admits of ſignatures and ipſe dixits as indiſputable; I refuſe credit to them, and demand a ſight of the original, the manuſcripts they talk of.—Much good-nature, a deſire to befriend

Mr.

Mr. Macpherſon, knowledge of his perſonal honour, and an enthuſiaſm natural to men who are long habituated to the ſtudy of the Belles Lettres, inſenſibly led the Doctor to admit of teſtimony which a man more circumſpect would refuſe, and eſpecially when having ſuch an opportunity as he then had of informing himſelf better. But what Dr. Johnſon ſays is true: "The people of "the Low Countries know as little of "the Highlands as the Engliſh themſelves."

When I travelled in the Highlands, I made it my buſineſs to ſee as many as reſided in the country, of thoſe gentlemen whoſe names the Doctor has made uſe of. Mr. Donal Macqueen, miniſter of Killmuir, in the Iſle of Sky, is the firſt name who vouches for Mr. Macpherſon's tranſlation "being a literal "one," and "that the original was re"peated by numbers, in every part of "the Highlands." This is the learned miniſter who choſe to be ſilent when interrogated.

interrogated on this ſubject by Doctor Johnſon; and although he gave his ſignature to Dr. Blair, as a voucher for the authenticity, to my certain knowledge, he is not in poſſeſſion of a line of the originals, although long in ſearch of them. He wiſhed to procure me ſome, but knew not how. He knows the *compoſitions of the fifteenth century* as well as others. Is it poſſible that ſuch a learned miniſter, reſiding on the very iſland where the greateſt part of the poems are ſaid to have been got, who vouched for the authenticity of them ſo ſoon as they were publiſhed, declared they were in every body's mouth, and, knowing the uſe of pen, ink, and paper, would not take ſome, at leaſt, of them down in writing to convince the world? Yet it is a truth, in 1778 this gentleman could not produce one line of them.—Mr. Donald Macleod, miniſter of Glenelg, I think, lodged Mr. Macpherſon on his journey. He has vouched alſo for the authenticity; yet though I challenged

him to produce three lines of the original, he could not ſhew one. Other rhimes, of little merit, he had enough.

Mr. Niel Macleod, one of the miniſters of Mull, vouched, but could not, although deſirous of it, favour me with one line. He ſent for different people, who *he* thought were poſſeſſed of them, but they produced only the *compoſitions of the fifteenth century*.

Mr. Mac Aulay, chaplain to the 88th regiment, is mentioned alſo as a voucher. He knows juſt as much of the poems as his above brethren. — I have converſed with Mr. Macaulay on the ſubject.

'Lachlan Macpherſon, of Strath-'maſhie, Eſquire, gives a very full and 'explicit teſtimony, from particular 'knowledge, in the following words: "That in the year 1760, he accompa-"nied Mr. Macpherſon during ſome "part of his journey through the High-"lands, in ſearch of the poems of Oſ-"ſian: that he aſſiſted him in collect-"ing them: that he took down from

"oral

" oral tradition, and tranſcribed from " old manuſcripts, by far the greateſt " part of thoſe pieces Mr. Macpherſon " has publiſhed: that ſince the publi- " cation, he has carefully compared the " tranſlation with the copies of the ori- " ginals in his hands, and that he finds " it amazingly literal! even to ſuch a " degree as often to preſerve the ca- " dence of the Galic verſification."—If Mr. Macpherſon, of Strathmaſhie, had " copies of the original in his own " hands," why not ſhew them? Why did not the Doctor aſk them, and depoſit them in the Advocate's or Univerſity's library? Where are they now? Mr. Macpherſon is dead, and his manuſcripts, I ſuppoſe they will ſay, have been buried with him! It were eaſy to ſhew them, if they had them; but every circumſtance confirms the fraud and impoſture.

The Doctor ſays further, " That Sir " James Macdonal aſſured him, that af- " ter having made, at his deſire, all the

" enquiries

" enquiries he could, he entertained no " doubt of the authenticity: that he " lately heard ſeveral parts of them re- " peated in the original. — This parti- " cular muſt have great weight, as it is " well known how much the judgment " of Sir James deſerves to be relied " upon, in every thing that relates to " literature and taſte."—This particular muſt have great weight, indeed, to diſ- prove the authenticity; as a gentleman of Sir James's learning and taſte would not be ſatisfied with hearing lines re- cited, but would ſend for Mr. Donald Macqueen, the *learned* miniſter of his own pariſh, alluded to by Dr. Johnſon, and mentioned above as a voucher, and would have taken down the lines in writing. — When a controverſy was known to be on foot, is it not abſurd to ſuppoſe, that a gentleman of the firſt- rate abilities of the age, would neglect ſuch an opportunity of committing to writing what might be ſoon irretriev- ably loſt? Sir James would certainly,

if

if he had heard them, have ſeen them written, and ſent them out to Edinburgh to the Doctor, as an incontrovertible fact; and I am amazed the Doctor did not requeſt it of him.

"Deſirous, however," continues the Doctor, "to have this tranſlation par-
"ticularly compared with the oral edi-
"tions of any who had parts of the ori-
"ginal diſtinctly on their memory, I
"applied to ſeveral clergymen, to make
"enquiry in their reſpective pariſhes
"concerning ſuch perſons, and to com-
"pare what they rehearſed with the
"printed verſion. Accordingly, from
"Mr. John Macpherſon, miniſter of
"Slate, in Sky; Mr. Niel Macleod, mi-
"niſter in Mull; Mr. Macnicol, mini-
"ſter in South Uiſt; Mr. Donald Mac-
"queen, miniſter of Kilmuir, in Sky;
"and Mr. Donald Macleod, miniſter of
"Glenelg; I have had reports on this
"head, containing diſtinct and explicit
"teſtimonies to almoſt the whole epic
"poem of Fingal, from beginning to
"end,

" end, and to ſeveral of the leſſer poems, " rehearſed in their preſence, and com- " pared by themſelves with the printed " tranſlations." Three of theſe five mi- niſters I know, and waited upon them when I travelled in that country for in- formation. I begged their aſſiſtance in procuring a ſmall ſpecimen of Oſſian; which they granted; but, in place of going to their cabinet for manuſcripts, or copies of them, as I expected, appli- cation was made to ſome old man, or ſuperannuated fidler, who repeated over again the tales of the *fifteenth century*. If this be not true, let Meſſieurs Mac- queen and Macleod contradict it, and produce the originals if they can. Ei- ther the Doctor, or theſe gentlemen, have taken too much liberty with mat- ter of fact; or the one has impoſed on the other, and all upon themſelves, by a too great deſire to eſtabliſh an impoſ- ture, becauſe it brought an ideal ho- nour to the Highlands, and that ſome of the names in their popular tales were

inſerted.

inſerted. It is very ſingular, that nobody in the Highlands has attempted a complete Galic tranſlation of Macpherſon's Fingal and Temora. Had it been done twelve years ago, it would be no difficult matter to ſet it off as the compoſition of Oſſian; but now it is too late.— In my tour in the Highlands, a reſpectable miniſter begged I would ſet about a tranſlation of Fingal, and that he and others would undertake to prove it the compoſition of Oſſian, and procure affidavits for that purpoſe. We need not, therefore, be ſurprized to hear Highlanders confidently talk of their having ſeen and heard them repeated, although none can produce a ſpecimen. — If a man ſays he has a gold watch in his pocket, and I deny it; if he has it, is there any thing eaſier than convincing me, by ſhewing it? But to perſiſt in affirming that he has it, and publiſhing diſſertations to prove it; to rail, and abuſe all who will not believe him, is an inſult on the party, and a " degree of

" ſtubborn audacity the world has hi-
" therto been unacquainted with."— It is the laſt ſubterfuge of guilt.

There has been lately publiſhed at London, a book entitled, *Remarks on Dr. Johnſon's Tour into the Hebrides.* This book has been many years in compoſing. It underwent a vaſt variety of editions in manuſcript, and has been corrected, amended, and improved by many hands in Scotland; and, finding its way to London, was prepared for the preſs by a friendly embelliſher. Theſe amendments and additions are aſcribed by many to Mr. Macpherſon himſelf. How far this is true, I do not pretend to ſay; but I am certain it has been done by ſome perſon who has lived in England, ſome man different from the oſtenſible author; for there are ſuch local circumſtances mentioned in the book, as a perſon who had never been ſouth of the Tweed, could not have been acquainted with. If it be Mac-

pherſon's

pherſon's compoſition, it is his laſt effort in this controverſy.

I ſhall not take up my time with making obſervations on the illiberalities and ſcurrilities of which it is made up; but only will point out to the world ſuch a freſh inſtance of impoſture as will aſtoniſh, in which the author triumphs as having proved the authenticity of Oſſian's poems. — The book was written on purpoſe to eſtabliſh the genuineneſs of the poems. How far it has ſucceeded, appears from the following fraud, the only argument adduced: — "But as Dr. Johnſon may "think it too great a trouble to travel "again to the Highlands for a ſight of "old manuſcripts, I ſhall put him on a "way of being ſatisfied nearer home. "If he will but call ſome morning on "John Mackenzie, Eſq; of the Tem-"ple, Secretary to the Highland So-"ciety, he will find in London more "volumes in the Galic language and "character, than perhaps he will be

 "pleaſed

" pleaſed to look at, after what he has " ſaid." " Among theſe is a volume, " which contains ſome of Oſſian's po- " ems."—On reading the laſt ſentence, I was overjoyed that the originals of Oſſian were at laſt diſcovered, notwithſtanding my own bad ſucceſs in meeting with them. Being impatient to ſee them, I accordingly loſt no time in waiting on Mr. Mackenzie; and, having looking over theſe volumes in manuſcript, found no compoſitions of Oſſian therein! They are manuſcripts written in the Iriſh dialect and character, on the ſubject of Iriſh and Highland genealogy.—We have every reaſon to believe that this is the very manuſcript, if any, that was left at Becket's by Mr. Macpherſon ſome time ago, with a view to impoſe it as that of Oſſian; for I am credibly informed, this very piece was ſent to Mr. Mackenzie by him.

As the writer of the Remarks ſeems himſelf entirely ignorant of the contents of that manuſcript, being a ſtranger to the

the Iriſh character and contractions, it was vainly believed by him and his partizans, that with an old Iriſh manuſcript on genealogy, they might prove the originality of Oſſian.

This laſt attempt to deceive, is an inſult more glaring than the impoſture it was intended to ſupport; and which determined me not to overlook it. Nor is this the only literary impoſture that has been attempted by a Scotchman.—A Lauder endeavoured to prove Milton's Paradiſe Loſt a plagiariſm, by liberal quotations from his countryman Hog's tranſlation of Milton into Latin, by falſe quotations from Maſenius, Staphorſtus, Taubmannus, &c. with Latin lines of his own forging, until detected by Dr. Douglas. If Mr. Lauder could for a time impoſe on the public, by forging Latin verſes, why not Mr. Macpherſon be able to tranſlate a few lines from Engliſh into Galic?

Another perſon wiſhed to prove the Æneid Earſe, becauſe "Arma virumque "cano,"

"cano," and "Airm 's am fear canam" have the ſame meaning, and nearly the the ſame ſound.

I have now finiſhed what I meant to ſay on this ſubject. The truth is aſcertained, and, I believe, the public will not be favoured with any more tranſlations of *Galic poems*, nor *Diſſertations* for or againſt the authenticity of Oſſian; as the defenders of that cauſe have not hitherto been able to produce an original, though ſome diſingenuous attempts have been uſed. Like the author of the Remarks, they have choſen to let the imaginary *original* remain in the obſcurity, and to themſelves unintelligible ſtate, of the Iriſh characters! They have often been called on to produce three lines, yet nobody has been able to ſhew them.—They are ſtill called on to ſhew the original, with proper and competent vouchers of the authenticity, and proofs that there is no colluſion; for nothing but the original can perſuade. — Ten thouſand diſſertations avail nothing; and

any

any thing further on the ſubject, but a ſight of the original, ſhall have no attention paid it.

This relation of facts which I have given, may be contradicted, but can never be overborne; for facts are ſtubborn things: there is no contending with them but by facts.

FINIS.

*** A gentleman promiſed to ornament a ſcolloped ſhell with ſilver, if I ſhould bring him one from the Highlands, and to ſwear it was the identical ſhell out of which Fingal uſed to drink!